

critique

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GENDER DYSPHORIA



CRITIQUE



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Except where noted, all articles are by Denis Haack.

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When Rumors Become Fact



The second Thursday in February Margie and I drove to Rochester to speak at the 2018 L'Abri Conference. I dropped Margie and our luggage off at the front desk of the hotel where we would be staying, and parked our car in the ramp. As I got out of our car, a conference attendee, also getting out of his car, greeted me warmly. We chatted for a few moments in the Minnesota cold. He and his wife have attended frequently in the past and it was good to see them once again.

"So how is retirement treating you?" he asked.

"Retirement," I responded, surprised. "I'm not retired."

"But didn't you move?" he asked.

"Yes, we did—from Rochester, where we had lived for 30+ years to Savage, just south of the Twin Cities. But we didn't retire. Ransom continues as it always has."

It was his turn to be surprised.

This is not the first time we've heard this rumor—that we've retired—and perhaps the timing of our move was the impetus to get it circulating. Still, it's only a rumor, and untrue.

It's never been easy to distinguish rumor from fact. We know only in part and our hearts are deceitful, and that's in the best of times. It's more than

enough for us to inadvertently turn a rumor into a fact, a plausible untruth into the truth. "People trust their eyes above all else," Zoë Marriott writes in *Shadows on the Moon*, "but most people see what they wish to see, or what they believe they should see; not what is really there."

Add into the mix the relentlessly confusing tsunami of opinion, half-truths, tweets, texts, lies, rumors, and news—all purporting to be factual—that wash over us every day, and we can begin to wonder if being people of truth is even possible. "There are many things," Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "of which a wise man might wish to be ignorant." That's far easier said than done in a technologically wired age. I've intentionally cut back on social media and I'm still overwhelmed. "In the age of technology," Criss Jami says in *Venus in Arms*, "there is constant access to vast amounts of information. The basket overflows; people get overwhelmed; the eye of the storm is not so much what goes on in the world, it is the confusion of how to think, feel, digest, and react to what goes on."

When so many words proliferate, it is easy to assume that rumors carry little weight and matter little, but the opposite is true. Words matter, and exist with power to bring change. "A voice, a rumor!" the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah wrote. "Behold, it comes!—a great commotion! It will make the towns of Judah desolate, a haunt of jackals."

I have no idea if the rumor of our retirement has made any practical difference. I would be heartsick if it has decreased prayer on our behalf, because we cannot afford that. I know that giving to Ransom has decreased since we moved to Savage, but that's a correlation, not proof of a cause. We

have wanted to keep publishing *Critique* and *Letters from The House Between* in paper form, a costly choice that we will not be able to maintain if giving does not return this year to more normal levels. Still, I would be the first to insist this may have nothing to do with rumors and everything to do with God using the generosity of his people to communicate his will to us.

The only obvious thing in all of this, it seems to me, is the need for humility. Humility in expressing what I believe to be true, humility in asking questions and acknowledging when I don't know, humility in a willingness to admit when I'm mistaken, humility in wanting not just truth but wisdom. "Get Wisdom," the ancient teacher recommends. "Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you."

That is not a rumor; it's a fact. ■

Source: Quotes online (www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/lies); Jeremiah 10:22; Proverbs 4:5-6.



To the editor:
Dear Denis,

I just read your article “Drawing a Line with Idiots” [*Critique* 2017:6]. While I agree with what you say and how you cringe at what is passed off as Christianity, I also think that the media love to cover ‘snake handlers’ and make them look like mainstream Christianity. What do most evangelical Christians truly believe about things like undocumented immigrants, race issue, and dare I say, Trump? Have we been brain washed into thinking that a few well-publicized comments from some extreme Christians really do represent Christianity in America today? I believe that while we certainly have supported horrible things in the past, I don’t think that we as a whole have slipped off the edge of our central beliefs to be labeled ‘idiots’ (at least not all of us). We are sinners in constant struggle to maintain our faith, think Christianly (and your help in this area is truly appreciated), and grow in grace that has been given to us.

Thank you, Denis for all that you

do. I look forward to reading your publication every time I see it in the mail. This is the first time that I have felt that I could add a different perspective to your discussion for your consideration.

Sincerely
Paul Squillace
Rapid City, SD

Denis Haack responds:

Thanks so much for writing, Paul.

You are correct that we must beware of assuming that extremists speak for an entire class of people. My goal in that piece was to use tongue-in-cheek prose to encourage my readers to seriously reflect on a serious issue. That issue, as you note, is that many of us cringe at times at the professed beliefs and public actions of fellow Christians. Recent events have even caused many of us to reflect on whether we can continue to self-identify as “evangelicals.” In the same issue of *Critique*, for example, my friend Luke Bobo (“Race in America: A Conversation”) raises that question. And Mark Galli, the editor of Christianity Today, has recently written thoughtfully about it in an ongoing series of articles, prompted in part by the support in 2017 for Roy Moore by white evangelicals in Alabama.

I do not think, however, that all of this is a matter of allowing extremists to set the agenda. I interact with evangelical Christians all the time and in very different places representing a wide variety of churches and communities. Serious research is regularly conducted probing the beliefs and practices of all the various groups—religious and non—of people in American society. The findings, to say the least, do not encourage me. And although I do not share all his conclusions, Rod Dreher argues in *The Benedict Option* that the Christian community should withdraw

from attempting cultural change to shore up its flagging foundations in both praxis and doctrine.

As Ransom has long argued, all thoughtful believers will not come to identical positions on every political policy issue. We should expect, however, political reasoning that is robust, never reactionary, and consistently rooted not in cultural ideologies (of, say, conservatism or progressivism), but in biblical categories and a distinctly Christian political philosophy flowing out of the great tradition of church teaching. I see no evidence that this is happening—or even seen as needed, to say nothing of being actively desired and pursued—in the evangelical Christian community. Such a path does not lead to wisdom but folly.

We must realize that simply adopting a popular political ideology and agenda, even with proof texts, is conformity to the world and a form of idolatry. David Koyzis’ *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (IVP) has shaped my convictions at this point—and I recommend it warmly. ■

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POETRY

A Shout

From the falling form
of an intricate vase
water was freed,
each flowing cluster and drop
a complexity of light,
color and motion
spilling excitedly through the air
amidst one vivid yellow rose
and several white lilies
tumbling into space,
the glazed ceramic vase shattering,
scattering flowers,
shards and splinters
and splashing water
onto the exact geometries
of a tiled floor,
the incident wild and beautiful
like an explosive shout
against whispered rituals
of behavior. ■

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Scott Schuleit is the associate pastor at Taft Street Baptist Church. He enjoys preaching, the arts, theology, good conversation, and spending time with his dear wife Christina.





READING THE WORD: GENDER DYSPHORIA (PART ONE)

CHRISTIAN FAITHFULNESS AND GENDER DYSPHORIA: NAVIGATING PASTORAL CARE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH GENDER IDENTITY CONFLICT

First of a two-part article by Steve Froehlich

OH, THE THINGS THEY DON'T TEACH PASTORS IN SEMINARY.

Recently, I had the privilege of presenting an all-day Pastor's Forum at a respected conservative theological seminary on the theme of Pastoral Care and Gender Dysphoria. The seminary president attended the mid-day session, and I couldn't resist the opportunity of teasing him, "Yet again, you've failed us pastors." After the chuckling subsided, he quipped, "We're trying to keep up." I believe him. Those entrusted with the work of pastoral training and mentoring face a formidable task of equipping leaders in a relentlessly and rapidly changing cultural landscape. No area of culture has seen greater controversy and upheaval than sexual and gender identity.

At the Pastor's Forum I asked the 250 leaders in attendance, "How many of you have someone in your congregation who lives with gender dysphoria?" Two or three hands went up. "How many of you know someone in your relational network who lives with gender dysphoria?" A dozen hands went up. "How many of you know your day is coming?" As an uneasy laughter spread across the room, nearly every hand went up.

My day came about two and a half years ago, and I was unprepared.

I have known Chris for nineteen years, for the entirety of my current pastorate. Chris was three when I arrived, a covenant child of one of our core families in the congregation. Over the past two decades, I can say honestly that no one in the church family has been more hospitable than Chris. Yet, the gregariousness often masked an anguished unseen part of Chris's life. Twice in high school Chris attempted

suicide, and Chris's arms still bear scars from many years of cutting. By the time Chris made it halfway through college, after years of searching the Bible, speaking with counselors, and reading medical literature, Chris had concluded that the terror and torment of life especially post-puberty was the result of gender dysphoria.

Chris is biologically female yet has never known a time, even from age three or four, in which it ever seemed normal to identify as female. Chris's mom remembers brushing off adamant early childhood objections Chris would make when asked to wear a dress, "Mom, I'm not a girl. I'm a boy."

My heart breaks when I think about a lifetime of pain Chris has experienced on top of fear of rejection, longing for belonging, and uncertainty about where to go for help. Yet, even in the mysterious recesses of our being and the chaotic avalanche of life, dare we entrust ourselves together to the omnipotent love of God and the promise of the gospel to bring healing and hope? I find myself responding with the same helplessness confidence of Peter in his reply to Jesus, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

In the spring of 2015, Chris and I had coffee to talk about the implications of living with gender dysphoria. I have long admired Chris for being smart, motivated, and honest, and I knew that whatever Chris had to say would be carefully thought out. In a nutshell, Chris said, "I want you to know that I am committed to Jesus and to living faithfully as a Christian. I want you to know that I love our church – it's my family and I feel safe there. And I want you to know I've decided to present as male. I'm going by Chris. I believe the conflict I've been facing in

my life related to my gender identity is the result of something that's not working correctly in my body. I know that God did not create us to live with this conflict, and the conflict I'm facing is a result of the Fall. But, I've concluded that the only way I can live with any meaningful resolution to this conflict is to live as a male. In fact, I believe that I really am male and that this decision to transition is a move toward the kind of wholeness God has in mind for us."

Oh, the things they don't teach pastors in seminary.

My mind was racing as I prayerfully considered how to respond. Here was a young person I love and genuinely like and value, a covenant child whose pain and struggle over the years had drawn me into deep concern and prayer, a friend who was trying both to survive and to live faithfully. What do I say? Of course, there was much to affirm in what Chris had shared, not the least of which was an enduring faith in Christ and a commitment to the Body of Christ. Thanks be to God! As I pondered what to say to Chris, I knew (obviously) that I had much to learn and that I did not know how to evaluate the decision Chris was making to identify as male. But I replied to my friend, "I'm willing to know you as you want to be known. I have no doubt that you fear the possibility of rejection and even anger in response to this decision, but I promise you that I will never shame you and I am committed to standing with you as your friend. I'm proud of you for the courage it takes to take these steps, and for your commitment to live by faith. Is that enough for now?"

Chris nodded gratefully, and so began my journey into pastoral care and gender dysphoria.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

Since that conversation with Chris, several books by Christian authors related to gender identity and the transgender movement have rolled off the presses. Most helpful to me has been Mark Yarhouse's *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* which lays out a challenging framework within which parents and disciplers can work out a plan of pastoral care and within which those living with gender dysphoria can find some moorings to map a way forward.

One of the most important reminders Yarhouse makes repeatedly is: "when you've met one person with gender dysphoria... you've met one person with gender dysphoria."

Chris's story is one story, not everyone's story. And this is my one story about learning to serve and shepherd Chris and our church family.

Because of its basic character in our lives, much of our so-called understanding about sex has been assumed. It's the water in which we as humans have been swimming for our entire history, and as Jonathan Grant reminds us in *Divine Sex*, those watery currents are hard to see unless together we find ways to step back. So, I think it's important to affirm that as we collectively embark on this study of gender and sexuality, we are engaging in a work that will likely take a long time to complete. We would do well to remember that the Christian Church did not settle the doctrine of the Incarnation until the fifth century. And while sexual and gender identity are essential to humanness and therefore of great importance to human flourishing and Christian sanctification, it is not of the same order of doctrine as the Incarnation. Fear entices us to believe

otherwise. We need to learn how to give these matters a just measure, the weight they are due.

My prayer is that my thoughts here will be a small contribution to a much larger ongoing conversation that needs to mature within the Church. These thoughts are not the final word on the subject, and I still have much to learn. Plus, I'm keenly aware that I'm writing as an outsider. That is, I do not live with gender dysphoria, so I must endeavor to write with humility as one who continues to listen and learn. My most immediate concern is that I be a faithful shepherd to the flock entrusted to my care.

Chris sees himself as member of the LGBTQ+ community, but he does not represent the transgender movement. Similarly, everything going on in the transgender movement playing out sensationally in the media and politics does not represent Chris. Chris is one person, and my responsibility is to walk faithfully with Chris in the story of his life.

Yes, I just used the male pronoun. More on that later.

WHAT IS GENDER DYSPHORIA?

Mark Yarhouse, one of the few biblically faithful Christian clinicians and researchers specializing in sexual and gender identity, defines gender dysphoria as "the experience of distress associated with the incongruence wherein one's psychological and emotional gender identity does not match one's biological sex."¹ Gender dysphoria exists when one's interior identification² (I am male, I am female) conflicts with one's exterior characteristics (I have a male body, I have a female body).

Gender dysphoria is rare, yet I

believe there are sound reasons to believe that it can be a real condition that exists apart from sexual experimentation, rebellion, or views of fluid sexuality often common in the transgender movement.

Because the experience of gender dysphoria is completely foreign to people who do not face gender identity conflicts, it can be difficult to understand or even to regard with credibility. Gender coherence, or the absence of gender dysphoria, is so universally common that some people who are cynical about the existence of gender dysphoria make ungracious and demeaning quips like, "Just look down your pants—what more evidence do you need about whether you're a man or a woman." Therefore, some people suggest either that gender dysphoria is one more kind of mental confusion or that it is cultural capitulation, a caving to social ideology or influence. But I disagree with that one-size-fits-all perspective.

Regarding the first suggestion (it is mental confusion), research gathered and cited by Mark Yarhouse and Oliver O'Donovan strongly suggests that genuine gender dysphoria is not delusion. According to their research, delusion usually manifests across a broad range of areas in life and personality, and usually that is not the case with gender dysphoria. Furthermore, people living with gender dysphoria are fully aware (painfully so) of the biological realities and the conflicts they experience.

The second suggestion (it is the result of influence) implies that gender dysphoria is a choice (perhaps the result of peer pressure or desire for sexual satisfaction), or the impact of early childhood abuse. Indeed, these

**STEVE FROELICH'S
RESEARCH AND CAREFUL
BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON
HOW WE SHOULD THINK
ABOUT GENDER DYSPHORIA
IS THE MOST HELPFUL AND
PRACTICAL WORK THAT I
HAVE READ ON THIS TOPIC.
THIS WILL BE OF ENORMOUS
HELP TO PASTORS AND
OTHERS WHO SEEK TO OFFER
SENSITIVE AND BIBLICAL
CARE TO THOSE WHO ARE
STRUGGLING WITH THIS ISSUE
AND TO THEIR FAMILIES
AND FRIENDS.**

**—Richard Winter,
professor emeritus of
applied theology and
counseling, Covenant
Theological Seminary**

influences may be contributing factors for some. Consequently, these factors should be carefully and honestly explored, and not casually dismissed. But there is indisputably no evidence that anyone *wants* to live with gender dysphoria. To the contrary there is consistent evidence that those who live with gender dysphoria will go to great lengths to relieve themselves of the pain and chaos that accompanies the conflict. People who live with gender dysphoria want to be whole people and coherently sexed as male or female.

While not every person with gender dysphoria experiences the conflict with the same level of intensity, the pain is commonly so great that 41 percent of people who experience gender dysphoria attempt suicide (this percentage is disputed by no one familiar with the experience of gender dysphoria). Christian ethicist, Robert Song, describes gender dysphoria as “a body that is at war with itself.”³

Although medical researchers continue to try to unravel the mystery of the conflict, they have unearthed no specific cause for gender dysphoria. The conflict often has early onset manifesting in childhood, sometimes as early as 3–5 years of age—this matches Chris’s story. In the majority of instances, according to case studies, the conflict dissipates or even disappears by age 18 (post puberty). This means that we (parents, counselors, pastors, doctors, etc. together) need to learn how to do everything possible to help conflicted pre-pubescent children wait and delay conclusions or interventions until it is clear that the conflict persists. In fact, influential social critic, Camille Paglia (a non-Christian who self-identifies as transgender) refers to pre-pubescent interventions as “child abuse” and

“evil.”⁴ However, for those for whom the conflict persists, some report that they find some degree of relief by exploring a range of interventions from better understanding to surgery. More on these interventions below.

O’Donovan regards gender dysphoria as a “condition which has so far proved intransigent to every mode of psychiatric treatment.”⁵ He muses that it should be no surprise, then, that those with this condition may seriously consider a change of expression or a change of physiology to resolve the incongruity with their identity. In fact, he continues, “their very insistence in pursuing the hope of surgical intervention shows with what anguish they experience the dividedness of physical sexuality from gender identity.”⁶

Gender dysphoria, as a painful conflict or a distressing condition, like many results of the Fall we all experience, is worthy of sorrow, but is not in itself a sin that requires repentance.

Gender dysphoria involves conflicted *identity* and, as researchers have observed and those who experience the condition have testified, it frequently does not involve sexual *attraction*. In fact, many people with gender dysphoria report greatly diminished sexual attraction.

Gender dysphoria exists when the constituent elements of a person’s sex, which usually work together coherently to define a person’s sex, are in conflict with one another. “In its divided nature [the body has] become a sign of the fallen creation.”⁷

Now, at this point I need to acknowledge that there is a divergence of views about what defines a person’s sex. Some Christians regard anatomy (genitalia, chromosomes) as the objective visible features which define a person’s sex.

These brothers and sisters regard anatomy as the orienting feature which determines how other discordant sexual components must resolve. This is a reasonable position, but is not a view I share. X's and Y's do not seem to answer all the questions manifest in the conflict. Jonathan Grant acknowledges that there are "confirmed aspects of male and female sexuality that go beyond our different bodies and reproductive capacities."⁸ The view I share is that a person's sex is recognized by the coherence of those constituent elements in body and spirit⁹ which comprise a person's sex. I believe that genuine gender dysphoria is possibly much like an intersex condition in which elements of both sexes appear to be present in the same person.

Gender dysphoria is not new. It is not an invention of the modern sexual revolution. There are historical and anthropological studies that identify cultures which recognize a middle or ambiguous sex,¹⁰ and theologians as far back as Augustine (345–440) affirm the existence of cases that share the characteristics of gender dysphoria. Note what Augustine observes in *The City of God* (16.8): "As for Androgynes, also called Hermaphrodites, they are certainly very rare, and yet it is difficult to find periods when there are no examples of human beings possessing the characteristics of both sexes, in such a way that it is a matter of doubt how they should be classified." Jesus himself, without commentary, acknowledges that there are some people who are "born eunuchs" (Matthew 19:20). That is, throughout human history, there have been born people who have lived with ambiguous or uncertain gender identities as well as sexual dysfunctions.

HOW DO WE BEGIN TO FRAME PASTORAL CARE FOR THOSE LIVING WITH GENDER DYSPHORIA?

I've posed the question in terms of pastoral care because I'm focusing on how we love, counsel, guide, and walk with those we love within our Christian community. This is a family conversation, not an ecclesiastical statement about the transgender movement. I leave that work to my betters.

As Christians committed to God's glory, our starting point is God's creation. We bow to his wisdom and will as he directs us by his word. But we bow as broken people. God promises to give us new hearts that love him and desire to do his will. Even still, our hearts are divided, conflicted, and influenced by the old way of life. David pleads that the Lord will unite his divided heart (Psalm 86:11). Are we not like Peter who, devastated by his betrayal of Jesus, still confesses, "Yet, I love you, Lord" (John 21:15ff). Furthermore, we are broken of mind and body. These "dirt jars" (2 Corinthians 2:4) truly bear God's image, yet they do not function as they should. In more ways than we are willing to admit or able to recognize, we cannot live as our first parents were created or as we will live resurrected in the world made new. Even at our most glorious, we hobble and improvise. As a result, in this life our path toward resurrection is varied and incomplete—the strong carry the weak, the courageous lead the fearful, the wise guide the foolish as together we work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Romans 15:1; 1 Corinthians 12:22–26; Phil 2:12).

WHAT CAN WE AFFIRM FROM THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE

SEXED BEINGS, MALE AND FEMALE? WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES DO WE BEAR TO LIVE WITHIN WHAT GOD HAS MADE CLEAR IN HIS WORD?

We begin with a commitment to the goodness of God's creation. This is God's own declaration of what he made, and we say "Amen" when we make these affirmations:

1. In the beginning God created humans male and female (Genesis 1:26–27; Mark 10:6). These two sexes, distinctly yet together, bear God's image (Genesis 1:27), form society (Genesis 1:28; 2:18), and establish marriage (Genesis 2:24).¹¹ Sex (the noun) is *who we are*: male and female. Gender is *how we live* in the ordained social constructs of image-bearing, societal formation, and marriage. However, in popular culture, sex and gender have become reversed and indistinguishable so that gender now defines sex as a fluid, socially constructed self-declaration. In the popular view the social dynamics of gender define sex, and sex is defined autonomously ("You can be whatever you want to be"). But this is contradictory to the biblical view in which gender is the social expression of sex.
2. We are to honor the sex we possess as well as the sex possessed by others because it is in and through the male/female distinction-in-community that in significant ways God makes himself known in the world (Genesis 1:26) and in the Church (Ephesians 5:32).
3. Cultural expressions that identify maleness and femaleness range widely. They are not necessarily right and wrong in themselves (some are, some aren't—we need to

be discerning), and we must learn to reject lazy gender stereotypes (for instance: males are strong, like blue, and play with trucks while females are emotional, like pink, and play with dolls). But the ordained purpose of meaningful gendered cultural expressions is to distinguish maleness and femaleness, a distinction which is critical to applying biblical ethics for sexual behavior and to forming relationships. Therefore, the implication is that we are to use contemporary cultural forms to express clearly our sex and our sexed relationships (most critically, marriage). Paul refers to male and female hair styles in Corinth as situationally distinctive cultural indicators of sex and marital status in the order and worship of a local congregation in first century Greece (1 Corinthians 11:2ff).¹² While the primary intent of Deuteronomy 22:5 is to prohibit same-sex sexual behavior, it also prohibits falsely gendered sexual presentation for the purpose of sexual exploitation and sinful sexual behavior.¹³

4. Every person since Adam and Eve is fallen, and no person (except for Jesus) has ever experienced an uncorrupted or complete understanding and expression of sex. Because of God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:22), we can live with the expectation of substantial order in the world. The rhythm of seasons and the regularity of the physical universe assure us that, in spite of humanly irreparable dis-order, God's preservation of the world allows all people to experience significant continuity within his creation. But we inescapably experience this simultaneous

order and dis-order in many different ways including sex.

5. While we all certainly have more to learn on this point, based on what we do know, it's my opinion that a person's essential or ontological sex is unalterable. When God made Adam and Eve human, he also made them male and female. Even when a coherent unity of the constituent parts that work together to comprise and reveal a person's sex is absent (thereby leaving that person uncertain about his/her ontological sex), that ontological sex still exists and cannot be changed. In our age of increasing scientific and technological manipulation of the human body, I believe it's important to affirm that there are some aspects of what define us sexually that are beyond our reach to control or our ability to change. As such they endure as critical fixed pieces that contribute to gender identity. Thus, given the role of unalterable and inaccessible characteristics, any attempt to move from an incoherent toward a coherent ontological sex will always be limited and incomplete.

Chris and I disagree about this point. He is more optimistic that changes toward coherence actually establish gender identity. I am not convinced. I believe it is important to affirm that sexual ontology is not something we can manipulate—there are aspects of our sex which are beyond our reach and ability to control. We can no more change our sex than we can change our species. However, I very cautiously believe that therapeutic interventions may possibly enable a person to live more coherently with one's ontological sex. I make that allowance fully aware that those who define gender identity

based exclusively on genitalia and chromosomes will disagree with my allowance for this possibility.

HAVING OFFERED SOMETHING OF A BIBLICAL BASELINE FOR THIS DISCUSSION, I WANT TO EMPHASIZE SOME IMPORTANT QUALIFICATIONS:

1. Given the reliability of the body to reveal a person's sex, exceptions are rare. We should rely on physiology as an indicator of sex unless we have significant reasons to believe otherwise.
2. Given that God created sex as the basis for relationship with himself and others, exceptions are to be recognized in community, not autonomously. Exceptions require corroborating support from those in a position to speak knowledgeably about a person's mind, body, spirit, affections, and chemistry. It is no small thing to conclude that a person's anatomy is communicating inaccurate information about that person's sex, and self-diagnosis (while important) is insufficient in itself to justify an exception.¹⁴
3. Given that sex is a complex and deeply mysterious gift from God, we must be humble about oversimplifying that complexity and speaking with improper confidence about matters we know only in part. God assures us that he will give us sufficient knowledge to live faithfully, but he offers no reason to believe that we can know anything comprehensively. This assurance is true when we are making difficult decisions about understanding and charting a way through deep conflict and uncertainty related to sex.

4. Given God's covenant, we should not be surprised by the regularity of life that results from his covenant faithfulness. But we must not mistake this stability for the eradication of brokenness and the impact of sin in this life. We experience change and healing by his redemptive and sustaining grace, and we give thanks for the predictability of life due to his providence. By his grace it is common for us to rest in self-knowledge and to delight in the knowledge of others.
5. Given the nature of evil and the devastation of sin, we should not be surprised by the degree to which we can witness the distortion of God's good creation. Evil is present in the world and in us before we act and make our own contribution to this present evil age. There is no part of the universe untouched by the Fall, evil, and sin. So, we know that we will witness creational upheaval in the most profound and disorienting ways in every area of life, including sex.
6. Given the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of God, we may live together with our brokenness and sadness in hope knowing that he is making all things new. One day, he will wipe away all tears, and we will stand in his presence known by name, male and female, whole, complete, without conflict, and full of glory.

HOW DO WE PLACE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER DYSPHORIA WITHIN THE COMPREHENSIVE CALL TO CHRISTIAN FAITHFULNESS?

Recognizing gender dysphoria as a condition does not mean that we are helpless or hopeless. The

GENDER DYSPHORIA IS AN ISSUE WHICH WAS NOT EVEN IN OUR VOCABULARY, UNTIL WE SUDDENLY FOUND OURSELVES FACED WITH THE NEED TO BECOME EDUCATED ABOUT IT QUICKLY. AS CHRISTIAN PARENTS, WE WERE DESPERATE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD'S WORD AS WELL AS PASTORS, TEACHERS, RESEARCHERS, AND COUNSELORS SAID ABOUT THE SUBJECT.

STEVE FROELICH HELPED TO MEET THAT NEED AND SHOW US A FAITHFUL WAY FORWARD. HIS WRITING IS IMMERSSED IN SCRIPTURE, AND HE HAS LAID OUT THE MATERIAL WITH CLARITY AND WISDOM. HIS LOVING AND COMPASSIONATE SHEPHERD'S HEART CAN BE HEARD IN EVERY WORD HE WRITES. HIS RESEARCH HAS ANSWERED MANY OF THE NAGGING QUESTIONS WE HAD (WAS IT MY FAULT? IS IT SIN? HOW CAN WE LIVE WITH HOPE?). HE OPENED OUR EYES TO A WAY OF NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES AS WE TRUST GOD'S WORD AND LIVE BY FAITH. THE LORD HAS USED HIM TO RESTORE JOY IN OUR FAMILY. THANK YOU, STEVE, FOR THIS MUCH-NEEDED RESOURCE FOR CHRISTIAN FAMILIES!

—Parents (name withheld)

acknowledgement of condition is not resignation, nor is it an assumption that we can do nothing. God is always and everywhere present in the fullness of his redemptive power and purpose. How then do we live? ■

(End of part one. The second half of the article will appear in Critique 2018:3)

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Steve Froehlich has served as senior pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Ithaca, N.Y., since 1998. He completed graduate theological and pastoral

studies at Reformed Theological Seminary (MDiv, 1991) and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (DMin, 2015). His doctoral thesis, Faithful Presence: How

Community Formation Shapes the Understanding and Practice of Calling, engages the ideas of James Davison Hunter's To Change the World and explores their impact on discipleship in Christian community. Previously, Froehlich served as assistant to the founding pastor of Highlands Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Ridgeland, Minn.; executive vice president of Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Miss.); and board chair of Chesterton House Center for Christian Studies at Cornell University. Froehlich and his wife, Sheryl, have three sons and four grandchildren. She is a gifted speaker, writer, and teacher, and serves as assistant to the director of admission at Ithaca College, Ithaca, N.Y.

The views expressed in this article are Froehlich's own and do not speak for any of the organizations with which he is associated.

FROELICH'S END NOTES

- 1 Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 20.
- 2 I believe we should not regard the interior aspects of our whole being as immaterial or non-physical.
- 3 Robert Song, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 500.
- 4 Camille Paglia in a video excerpt from The Battle of Ideas 2016: www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8BRdwgPChQ
- 5 Oliver O'Donovan, "Transsexualism and Christian Marriage," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 136.
- 6 Ibid., 147.
- 7 Song, 500.
- 8 Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex*, 97.
- 9 Rob Smith, "Responding to the Transgender Revolution" (www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/responding-to-the-transgender-revolution), October 12, 2017 quoting John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, 78. Smith affirms that sex is more than the body, but concludes that the spirit and body can never be at odds with each other. "Biological processes are not just functions of the body as distinct from the soul or spirit, and mental and spiritual capacities are not seated exclusively in the soul or spirit. All capacities and functions belong to the human being as a whole, a fleshly-spiritual totality." In other words, scripture understands 'human beings holistically as single entities which are psychosomatic unities.' We are dealing, then, with a both-and: an ontological duality (a distinct body and soul) within a functional holism (an integrated person)." In my opinion, it's not at all clear how Smith's appeal to Psalm 139 supports his claim that functional holism is an incorruptible aspect of humanness and sex. Smith concludes that "there is, then, no person or soul or spirit that has been created independently of the body and then placed in the body (or perhaps in the wrong body)." We agree in rejecting such a radical dualism. Nevertheless, while functional holism is nearly universally normative, we must acknowledge (and in fact be unsurprised) that the effects of the Fall may be far-reaching enough as to sometimes create a dysfunctional holism, a disruption of the integrity of sex and gender.
- 10 See the works of Richard Winter, Megan DeFranza, or Gilbert Herdt for historical/anthropological evidence of a "third sex," a category that includes but is not limited to gender dysphoria.
- 11 Along with other results of the Fall, disregard for creationally gendered relationships contributes to 1) the defacing of God's image and glory—"They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images" (Romans 1:23); 2) the corruption of society—"They were filled with

all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Romans 1:29–31); and 3) the violation of marriage—"They gave up natural relations" (Romans 1:27).

- 12 Anthony Thistelton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 830–831, 836–837. "Paul insists that a socio-symbolic expression of gender identity cannot be brushed aside.... [T]he gospel does not revoke expressions of the divine will established in the order of creation, or even sensitivities of perception within a surrounding culture.... Gender differentiation relates to that which God wills, decrees, and expresses in creation or in the creation order.... [Quoting Judith Gundry-Volf] 'Humanity exists in community centered around the creation of male and female.'" Paul "insists" that gender differences be maintained for the Church to exist and function with integrity.
- 13 Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 287–288—Deuteronomy 22:5 "does not refer simply to fashions or styles of dress as the warning contained in the final clause makes clear. It refers" either to transvestitism "associated with certain forms of homosexuality" or with "practices associated with the cults of certain deities." Allan Harman, *Deuteronomy*, 202—"Such interchange of clothing was associated both with types of homosexuality and also with particular forms of heathen worship. That these... aspects are in view seems confirmed by the way in which the practice is described as an abomination." Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 240–241—Deuteronomy 22:5 "is not about styles or fashions in clothing, though it has been quoted in earnest" to that end. "Almost certainly it is about the perverted crossing of genders either in orgiastic rites involving transvestitism, or in some form of pagan worship, or both. The final phrase of the law shows that some form of serious immorality or idolatry was involved." *JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 200—Plausible readings of Deuteronomy 22:5 include "disguising one's self as a member of the opposite sex [to] facilitate... fornication" and "a perverse means of sexual stimulation or homosexual role playing." Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy*, 213—Deuteronomy 22:5 is "a warning... not to identify with degrading sexual and homosexual practices." Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 337—"The concern [of Deuteronomy 22:5] is either to discourage homosexuality or to prohibit transvestite practices found in [pagan] worship."
- 14 Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 43. "The self is not such a good place to look to for authority, knowledge, and trustworthiness." Walker is correct with respect to authority, but he overstates the case regarding knowledge and trustworthiness. We value knowledge in

community and the wisdom of many counselors (Proverbs 15:22). However, reliable self-knowledge is essential to navigating the many choices and circumstances in the life of faith. Humans' competence in acquiring knowledge is the basis for our moral accountability to worship God (Romans 1:18–22). The scriptures assume that individual humans possess the ability and responsibility to deduce trustworthy knowledge as a basis for making wise choices (1 Corinthians 11:14; Proverbs 6:6). As Calvin pens the opening lines of the Institutes (I.1.i), he affirms with equal emphasis the necessity of knowledge of God and knowledge of self, pondering that "which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern." There is knowledge I cannot know apart from divine self-disclosure in revelation, and there is knowledge others cannot know about me apart from personal self-disclosure in relationship. Therefore, we must listen to one another's stories and begin by receiving them as true.

We Labor Unto Glory



Add up the hours spent on our job (whatever it is) and the myriad tasks (whatever they are) that must be done after we leave the workplace (wherever it is) and we have the single largest slice of our waking hours. Chances are it is also the single largest slice of our energy and concentration, and will be for the vast majority of our time between birth and death. Work is central to our existence and to our humanity.

Here's something else that is true and worth remembering: our work either has meaning or it does not. Which is why the meaning of work has been discussed, defined and debated endlessly across cultures, religions, philosophies and worldviews across all of history. And the debate has probably arisen (or raged) within each of us as well.

It is here that Christian faith provides rich answers without ignoring the disappointments and complications that encrust our work and turn it into toil. It is an aspect of biblical teaching that should be celebrated in sacred song, and now is celebrated, beautifully, and thoughtfully, in *The Porter's Gate: Work Songs*.

Carpenter, you frame a house for those who need protection

*Laborer, you lift a heavy burden for the weak
Leaders, build a city that all children may rejoice in*

*May God's kingdom come
On earth, His will be done
Lord, be close to us
Lord, have mercy on us
Lord, please put Your hand on us
Day by day*
[from "Day by Day"]

The Porter's Gate is "a sacred arts collective created to identify with and fulfill the most impactful role of the Christian Church: to be its porter, one who looks beyond church doors for guests to welcome. The Porter's Gate seeks to build an ecumenical community that invites conversation and collaboration in an exploration of faith." (www.portersgateworship.com)

C. S. Lewis famously complained in *God in the Dock* that when he first came to faith he found church music to be "fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music." The music in this CD, in sharp contrast, embodies keen biblical theology expressed in lively lyrics set to lovely music that fits the wonder of its expression.

*Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes with which He sees
Yours are the feet with which He walks
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world
Yours are the hands*

[from "Christ has no Body Now but Yours"]

The Porter's Gate: Work Songs celebrates the biblical insight that our vocations are never incidental to faith but essential. The work of our hands and feet and imaginations, regardless of

what we do in our callings, is kingdom work done to God's glory.

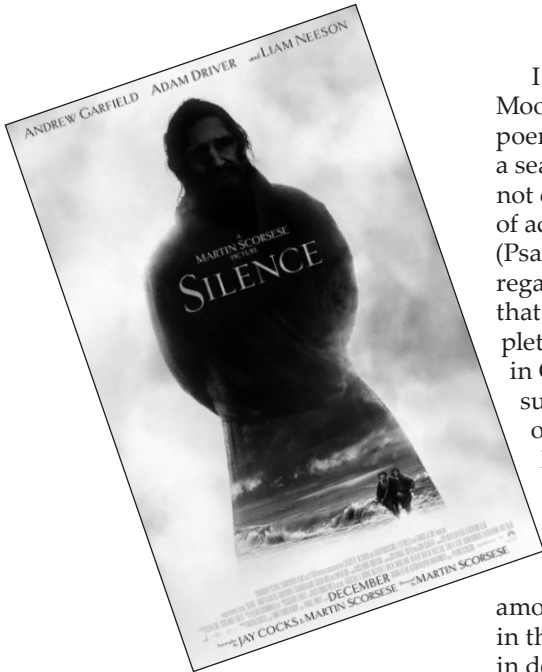
The creative artist behind The Porter's Gate project is Isaac Wardell, director of worship arts at Trinity Presbyterian in Charlottesville, Virginia. For *Work Songs* he brought together an impressive list of musicians including Audrey Assad, Aaron Keys, Joy Ike, Josh Garrels, and David Gungor. "This collection is not happy clappy music," Robert Berman says. "This is profound reflection on the lives to which Christ calls us, as well as being art music well worth supporting on its musical merits." (www.worshipmusician.com)

*Oh, the deeds forgotten; oh, the works unseen
Every drink of water flowing graciously
Every tender mercy, You're making glorious
This You have asked us
Do little things with great love
Little things with great love*
[from "Little Things with Great Love"]

Work Songs assumes that our ordinary work is never useless, never unnoticed by the one who is Redeemer, Lord, and Judge. We do not need to make our daily work extraordinary but to pursue our days with faithfulness. This is where we have been called, where love can be made real in a broken world, where we find ourselves laboring in God's kingdom, in hope that his kingdom will soon be completed. Our work matters not because we think it does but because God declares it so. This truth can be hard to hold onto in a broken world. *Work Songs* can help us hold onto it by setting our hearts to singing. ■

CD recommended: The Porter's Gate: *Work Songs* (2017)

The Silence Beyond All Endur



I read Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence* a few years after it was first published in English in 1969. I remember being stunned by the power of Endo's story, by his deceptively simple prose, by his insight into the human condition, and most of all by his courageous refusal to look away when faith in God is tried to the breaking point.

Christian friends surprised me by being dismissive of the book. Concerned that faith was declining in the West, they said what was needed were stories of victory not of difficulty, of faith that was able to look death and suffering in the face and smile, rejoicing that all things work for good because God is greater than anything a hostile world could muster. I remember trying to defend the novel but feeling that I hadn't really known what to say.

What I would say now is simple: I'd tell them they weren't reading their Bibles with much clarity or understanding.

I recently heard my friend Joshua Moon preach on Psalm 88. This ancient poem is also about the silence of God, a searing song of lament that does not conclude with a satisfying stanza of adoration, relief, and hopefulness. (Psalms 44 and 89 are similar in this regard.) We must see, Moon insisted, that Psalm 88 is not defective or incomplete. It is because the psalmist believes in God that it is so hard to cry out in suffering and darkness and to receive only silence in response. Faith is not lacking, for it is faith that drives the lament. "O Lord," the Hebrew poet says, "why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?" It is like dwelling among the dead, the poet says, not just in the midst of the tombs, mind you, but in death. We need such psalms, Moon said, because times of intense darkness and resounding silence are part of the life of faith in a broken world.

Why do we act as if this isn't true? Do we live such isolated, comfortable lives that we dare ignore living in reality? Sometimes such times last so long that we can't imagine bearing them any longer. This is the cry of the refugee who has lost loved ones to war and famine and stumbles into a camp of wretched waiting in conditions that sap the soul. It is the cry of the parent whose child has slipped into addiction and now has been found unconscious in an alley with a needle stuck in their arm. And so we pray, but God says nothing, does nothing, and we discover to our horror that silence can have an echo.

This is the anguished cry in *Silence*.

Silence is about the hidden Christians who went underground in Japan to escape a deadly persecution unleashed in the seventeenth century. Now Martin Scorsese has produced *Silence* (2016),

faithfully based on Endo's novel.

For a period of decades, Japan had opened itself to the West, allowing Portuguese, British, and Dutch merchant ships access to its ports. Trade flourished and in 1549 the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier brought Christianity to Japan. Later the samurai overlords became concerned at the influx of Jesuit missionaries and the massive numbers of Japanese peasants that converted, so they closed their island nation to the West and outlawed the Christian faith, punishable by torture and death.

Silence tells the story of two young Portuguese Jesuit missionaries who get themselves smuggled into seventeenth century Japan in order to find their old mentor, Father Ferreira, played by Liam Neeson, that rumor says has committed apostasy. They arrive in Japan to find a church driven underground by persecution, and they soon face the same brutality that Father Ferreira has already endured.

Silence is not an easy film to watch, but that is not a sufficient reason not to see it. True faith does not look away from the messiness of life. The danger in refusing to look into the dark corners of fallen reality is that slowly we come to imagine they do not exist and so become easy prey to the powers that dwell there.

In his book, *Silence and Beauty*, artist Makoto Fujimura says this about the film:

In many quarters communication of the good news is a consumer-driven, mall-like experience that plays to people's escapist fantasies; going to church or attending a Christian concert often is a reprieve from the ills that face us. Works like Silence seem harsh and stark, and

ing

they seem to hit home too deeply in an entertainment-filled world. Rarely do we encounter art that gives attention to the complexity, paradoxes, and mysteries of life without falling into the abyss of despair.

Silence is an antidote to the morphine-like numbness of our culture. It can and should shock us to see the deeper reality beyond the normative reality. If we care to know how deep the suffering of Christ goes—and how vast and even violent is the restoration process through Christ's suffering, then we had better start with knowing the dark, cruel reality of the fallen world. If we care to embrace hope despite what encompasses us, the impossibility of life and the inevitability of death, then we must embrace a vision that will endure beyond our failures. We should not journey toward a world in which 'solutions' to the 'problems' are sought, but a world that acknowledges the possibility of the existence of grace beyond even the greatest of traumas, the Ground-Zero realities of our lives. In such a journey, evil is no longer equal to the good, but the stench of death all around us, pulverized by even atomic powers, will remind us that it is despite ourselves that grace and restoration can take place. In a surrender to the inevitable we dethrone evil of its power. (p. 167)

Silence is a searing story of faith, doubt, courage, and persecution that centers on a single, brutally honest question: How is it possible to believe in a God of love that remains silent in the face of horrendous human suffering? The story assumes that God exists and that he has promised redemption through Jesus Christ who entered history, died on the cross, and rose to life again. But what do we think about



that God when ordinary believers are swept up in a painful spasm of persecution that is unjust, devious, and relentless. "I did not write a book about the Silence of God," Endo insisted. "I wrote a book about the Voice of God speaking through suffering and silence."

This is a question that is not merely worth asking, but one that must be asked by everyone who takes faith seriously in our broken world. ■

For further reflection:

The Rev. Dr. Joshua Moon's sermon can be heard online (www.ofthecross.org/multimedia-archive/the-eighteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-living-the-psalms-psalm-88)

Silence by Shusaku Endo, translated by William Johnston (New York, NY: Taplinger Publishing; 1969)

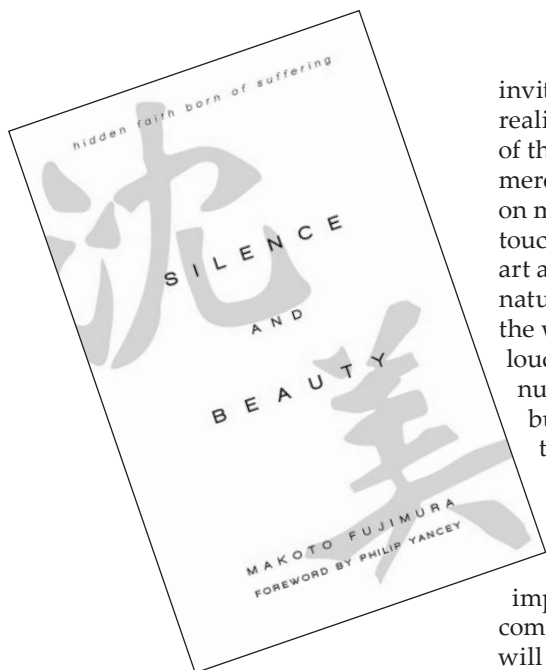
Silence and Beauty by Makoto Fujimura (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2016). The quotation from Shusaku Endo is found on page 143.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way? It seems clear that the film is intentionally made so that it is impossible for us to be unmoved by the story. (The same is true of Endo's novel.) Did you feel manipulated in any way? What is it about this story that so powerfully draws us into the pain of the narrative?
2. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
3. What was made attractive? How is it made attractive? What was made unattractive? How is it made unattractive?
4. With whom do you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? How do you know? Discuss the main characters in the film and their significance to the story.
5. You are with some non-Christian friends who have watched *Silence*. They ask you how you find it possible to believe in a God of love that remains silent in the face of horrendous human suffering. What would you say? Would you be able to say it in a way that might intrigue them to continue the conversation?
6. "*Silence* is relevant today," Makoto Fujimura says in *Silence and Beauty*

(p. 200), "in all places where devastations and torture occur. We certainly see parallels in the cries of freedom heard among the African American slaves in American history as well as persecution of minority Coptic Christians today in Egypt, and over 100 million Christians who face religion-related violence in over thirty-five countries. We need deeper reflections on our humanity through our dehumanized conditions, whether we are stricken with civil wars in Sierra Leone, bullets in Newtown's elementary school, or the reports of brutal torture of prisoners by waterboarding in post-9/11 America." Some evangelicals would be uncomfortable linking those events together. What arguments might they raise and how would you respond? How does our hesitation to honestly face the brokenness in our history keep us from being the agent of healing we could and should be in our fallen world? Why should Christians be the most courageously honest and unflinching in such reflections?

Quiet Wonder



It is possible to get through life by skimming over the surface of reality. Most things in the world of advanced modernity subtly push us towards skimming, usually in service to the golden calf of efficiency and productivity. It's easier and quicker than probing into the depths, patiently uncovering connections and contrasts that are glimpsed only with thoughtful, unhurried observation. The difference is like that between a puddle and a well. Both contain water and may look similar, especially at first glance. In reality though, the difference is profound. One is forever shallow, the other deep; one is thin, the other hides layers unseen waiting to be revealed.

On the surface, *Silence and Beauty* is a book about a classic 1966 novel (Shusaku Endo's *Silence*), a powerful 2016 movie (Martin Scorsese's *Silence*), art, faith, culture, suffering and the reality of God. As we begin to read, however, we discover we have been

invited to dive into a rich exploration of reality, and soon we are seeing all sorts of things with far greater clarity. It's not merely that Fujimura asks us to reflect on more things, though it's true he does touch on 9/11, Hiroshima, Japanese art and culture, the music of Bach, the nature of beauty, the horror of anguish, the way silence speaks of so much so loudly—and much more. It's not the number of topics Fujimura broaches but his creative ability to weave them together into a rich tapestry for us to appreciate that allows us to see more deeply into our own lives and faith and broken world.

Silence and Beauty is an important book for the evangelical community, though I suspect many will find it discomfiting. We tend to desire expertise not wisdom, answers not questions, certainty not ambiguity, propositions not stories, truth not beauty. But these are the things that Fujimura calls us to embrace.

Hemingway used the title A Movable Feast to describe his Parisian exploits. Christianity is a movable feast as well, transforming how we view ourselves, our marriages, our families, our communities. Christ began his ministry at a wedding in Cana, where in his first recorded miracle he turned water into wine. The Bible begins at a garden and ends in a feast. Thus, a theological map should explore these celebrations as the beginning and ending points of faith. But typically, religious communities are marked by somber legalism, and they avoid the complex nuance of extraordinary wine or art. A complex work of art that may lead to a deeper reflection on human experience and complexity, a work of art such as Silence, will be deemed suspect in such

a setting, as its ambiguity strikes many Christians I know as something to be avoided. They might say, "I do not want to have anything to do with failures of faith," or "To doubt God is to sin." Endo exposes the flaw in this thinking. It does not express faith in God but instead a faith in clarity and, as one of my friends puts it, "our lust for certainty." Faith can be rational, but only after a deeper journey toward mystery and transcendence. [p. 82]

I guess I'm suggesting that we should read *Silence and Beauty* with two things in mind. First, Fujimura will help you appreciate Endo's novel and Scorsese's film in ways that most of us likely missed the first time through. He fills in a cultural and theological backstory that few of us know on our own. Read it with friends, in a small group, because there is plenty that will prompt conversation and mutual discovery. And second, read *Silence and Beauty* as a lovely journey, led by a thoughtful artist/theologian toward mystery and transcendence. It is not the full journey we need to take, of course, but it is a reliable and fascinating beginning. In the process, your love for Christ, in whom are hidden treasures of silence and beauty, will be deepened. ■

Recommended: *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering* by Makoto Fujimura (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2016) 212 pp. + appendices + notes + indices.



Credits for *Silence*:

Director: Martin Scorsese

Writers: Jack Cocks and Martin Scorsese
(screenplay), Shusaku Endo (novel)

Producers: Martin Scorsese and others

Cinematography: Rodrigo Prieto

Starring:

Andrew Garfield (Rodrigues)

Adam Driver (Garupe)

Liam Neeson (Ferreira)

Ciaran Hinds (Father Valignano)

Issei Ogata (Od Samurai/Inoue)

Shin'ya Tsukamoto (Mokichi)

Yoshi Oida (Ichizo)

Yosuke Kubozuka (Kichijiro)

USA, 2016; 161 minutes

Rated R (some disturbing violent content)